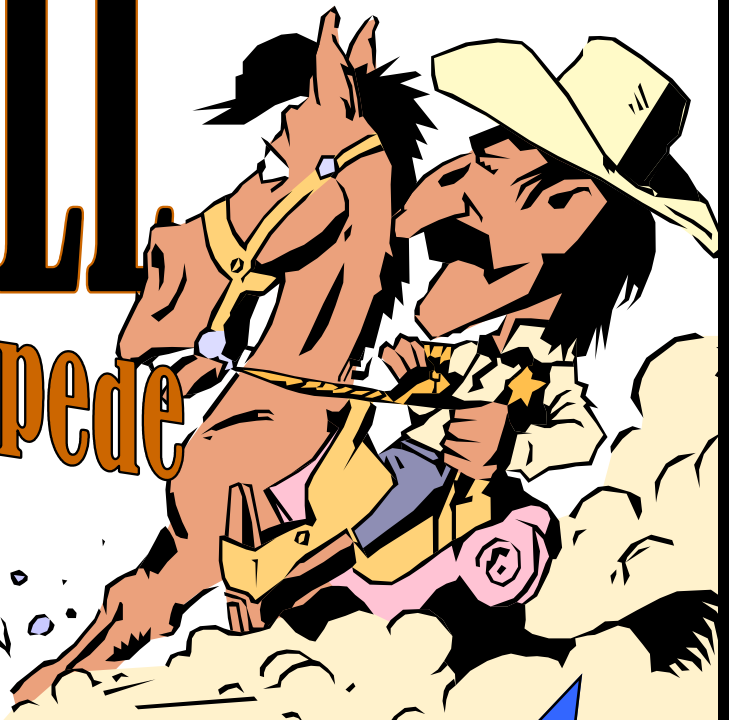




OKLAHOMA
CHILDREN'S THEATRE
TELE 405.606.7003 | BOX OFFICE 405.951.0011

STUDYGUIDE

PECOS BILL *and the Ghost Stampede* **by Eric Coble**



**A Play in
One Act**

Directed By Brenda Williams
June 14—25, 2006

Burg Theatre

Sponsored by the Ad Astra Foundation

**Touring shows
are also
available!**

*"Pa, you know that
ain't true. I'm just a
kid. Just an ordinary,
plain old kid...in a land
where everything's
bigger 'n' faster 'n' the
best west of Missouri"*

Missy

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ABOUT THE PLAY

An exciting play set in the West, in the early days of Texas. When the biggest herd of cattle west of the Mississippi disappears during the worst drought in history, it's weird. But when that herd transforms into ghosts, leveling everything in its path...well now we're into Pecos Bill tall-tale country. Young Missy Cougar-Wildcat has always wished she could live an adventure as big as her home state, when the roughest, rowdiest cowboy of all enters her world, she quickly finds herself up to her braids in a brand new hoot-n-holler legend packed with action, laughs...and the world's largest prairie dog!



"A rip-snorting tale full of fun and thrills"
Cleveland Call and Post

Cast of Characters

PA **Elizabeth Brooks**
a man who loves his guitar, ranch and family

MA **Christi Knight**
a women trying to survive

Missy **Courtney Hahne**
a girl trying to be as big as her state

Pecos Bill **Doug Brown**
a man bigger than any state

ABOUT THE PLAYWRIGHT, ERIC COBLE



Eric Coble was born in Edinburgh, Scotland and bred on the Navajo and Ute reservations in New Mexico and Colorado. His plays have been produced Off-Broadway and throughout the U.S. and Canada, including productions at Manhattan Class Company, the Kennedy Center, Alabama Shakespeare Festival, Cleveland Play House, Alliance Theater, Stages Repertory, and the Contemporary American Theater Festival. His awards include the AT&T Onstage Award and National Theatre Conference Playwriting Award.

Presently a member of the Cleveland Play House Playwrights' Unit and the Dramatists Guild, he is also a staff writer for "Footlight Parade," heard weekly across the U.S. on classical radio stations, and an occasional contributor to NPR. He was a featured writer in the 1999 Southern Writers' Project, and has been a finalist in the O'Neill National Playwrights Conference and the Y.E.S. Festival.

His scripts have won "Best of the Fest" at Cleveland Public Theatre, "Best Cleveland Premiere 1996" from Scene Magazine, and a Best Screenplay award from the Ohio Independent Film Festival. Three of his screenplays are in pre-production in the labyrinth of Hollywood--most recently in development with Interscope, HBO and Miramax.

FROM THE DIRECTOR, BRENDA WILLIAMS

Have you ever felt like you wanted to be bigger than life? Do you feel ordinary? Do you wish for adventure and excitement? Well, that's the story of poor little Missy Cougar Wildcat, a little girl who thinks she will never amount to anything. However, her new friend Pecos Bill shows her that "ain't nothing a human being with a good brain can't fix".



He helps her to realize she can do anything and go anywhere as long as she takes one special thing with her - HER IMAGINATION! How far can your imagination take you?



WHO IS PECOS BILL?

Pecos Bill, a mythical cowboy, grew out of the imagination of southwestern range hands who told tall tales to pass the time and to out-do each other in boasting. His originator is unknown. The story goes that Bill, the youngest of eighteen children of a Texas pioneer, was lost in crossing the Pecos River and was brought up by coyotes. He considered himself a coyote until a cowboy convinced him of his true identity, a human being and the cowboy's brother. After returning to civilized territory, Pecos Bill became the cowhand who invented all the tricks of the ranching trade; in various tales he appears as a buffalo hunter, cattleman, railroad contractor, and oilfield worker. His activities include teaching gophers to dig postholes, killing snakes by feeding them mothballs filled with red pepper and nitroglycerin, and roping whole herds of cattle at a time. He rode everything in the West, including a mountain lion and a cyclone. He invented the branding iron to stop cattle rustling and the cowboy song to soothe the cattle. On their wedding day, Slue-Foot Sue, Pecos Bill's girl friend, was determined to ride Bill's famous horse, the Widow-Maker, but the animal pitched Sue so high that she almost hit the moon. Her steel-spring bustle continued to bounce her so high that Bill finally shot her to keep her from starving. Pecos Bill's death is a matter of controversy. Some cowboys say that he died from drinking fishhooks with his whiskey and nitroglycerin; others insist that he died laughing at dudes who called themselves cowboys. Whatever the mode of his death, Pecos Bill exists in cowboy folklore as a



VOCABULARY WORDS

Prairie Dog: a burrowing rodent of the squirrel family with light brown fur that lives in large underground colonies.
Native to: grasslands of North America.

Drought: a long period of extremely dry weather when there is not enough rain for the successful growing of crops or the replenishment of water supplies

Herd: a large number of domestic animals, especially cattle, often of the same breed, that are kept, driven, or reared together

Folklore: traditional stories and explanations passed down in a community or

Stampede: an uncontrolled headlong rush of frightened animals

Exaggeration: to state that something is better, worse, larger, more common, or more important than is true or usual

Hyperbole: deliberate and obvious exaggeration used for effect, e.g. "I could eat a million of these"

Dialect: a regional variety of a language, with differences in vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation

AMERICAN FOLKLORE

Folklore includes fairy tales, fables, myths, legends and tall tales that people told each other over the years. Later the stories were written down. The plot of a folk story may be old, but details are likely to change over time as it is told and retold.

*“I scare myself sometimes. It ain’t easy bein’ a livin’ ledged.
Specially a hollerin’ one. You got any water?”*

Pecos Bill

TALL TALES

Throughout history people have written and told stories about their heroes. Some stories were about real heroes such as Annie Oakley and Johnny Appleseed, some were make-believe such as Slue-Foot Sue and Pecos Bill. In America, tall tales were first told by settlers who made their homes in the American wilderness. In those days, before TV and movies, people depended on storytelling for entertainment. After a long day's work, people gathered to tell each other funny tales.

A tall tale is a special kind of hero story because the heroes of tall tales are "larger than life". They are bigger or stronger than real people. They solve problems in ways that are hard to believe. This makes tall tales fun to read. Each group of workers-cowboys, loggers, railroad and steel workers-had its own tall-tale hero. Having a superhuman hero with the same job somehow made their lives easier. Perhaps it gave them strength or courage to do their difficult and dangerous work.

Every culture has its own way of telling how something develops : how the world was created. Tall Tales are stories that are told to the extreme like Paul Bunyan and Pecos Bill. Each of these stories explain why something happens. Paul Bunyan stories were told mostly in the Northwest. He is supposed to be responsible for making the Grand Canyon while fighting with his huge, blue bull named Babe. He also could cut down a tree with one blow. As you can see this story has been told to the extreme.

A tall tale is a story that has these features:

- *A larger-than-life, or superhuman, main character with a specific job.
- *A problem that is solved in a funny way.
- *Exaggerated details that describe things as greater than they really are.
- *Characters who use everyday language.

Your imagination is needed while making a Tall Tale.

OTHER FAMOUS TALL TALE CHARACTERS

Paul Bunyan

There have been few characters of American folklore with the stature of Paul Bunyan. This legendary hero of lumberjacks throughout America possessed strength, speed, and skill that matched the vastness of North America.

According to legend, Paul Bunyan and his giant blue ox, Babe, left many a mark on the landscape, receiving credit for creating Puget Sound, the Grand Canyon, and the Black Hills, among others.

Some folklore experts have credited the French-Canadians for starting the tales. Others attribute the tales to a Western logging company during the early 20th century. Still others consider it a European import.

All agree, however, that Bunyan legend probably grew as the tales about him grew, bringing a new meaning to the term "tall story." Stories about Bunyan and Babe first circulated through the logging camps of Michigan, Wisconsin, and Minnesota, where loggers first heard and then retold the fables, adding local or personal embellishments.

"An adventure is something that while you're doing it, you're wishin' with all your might that you was home tucked safe in your bed. And then when you do get home tucked safe in your bed, you look back on it and you think...

"That...was an adventure!"

Pecos Bill

Johnny Appleseed

For forty-nine years, John Chapman ("Johnny Appleseed") roamed the American wilderness, devotedly planting apple trees. The reason for John's mission is unknown, although it's said he dreamed of a land covered with blossoming apple trees; of a land where no one went hungry because apples were plentiful.

John's gentleness and courage were legendary even in his own time. He walked alone in the wilderness, without gun or knife. He chopped down no trees, and killed no animals. He was respected and appreciated by the Native American tribes and the new settlers alike.

John lived very simply. He slept outdoors, walked barefoot and ate berries. He made his clothes from sacks and wore a tin pot for a hat (and to cook with). John made his drinking water in winter by melting snow with his feet. Even the people of his time were amazed at his endurance.

John Henry

The legend of John Henry came about during the railroad boom era of the early 1800s. John Henry, according to legend, "was a steel-driving African-American man," who could hammer railroad spikes faster than anyone, and loved it. This Paul Bunyan-like character was born full-sized (over eight feet tall!) and went to work on the railroad when he was only three weeks old. Eventually, John Henry is challenged to compete against a steel-driving machine, to see who is better, man or machine... John Henry wins, but collapses, dead, at the finish line. John Henry "didn't really die... just stopped livin' in his Mammy's shack, and started livin' in the hearts of men, forever and a day." The point is, as John says, a man can do *anything* if he puts his mind to it.

PRE-PERFORMANCE ACTIVITIES

What is a Tall Tale?

DISCUSSION

1. Name some stories you have read about real heroes.
2. Identify some stories with make-believe heroes.
3. In what stories did a larger-than-life hero do something impossible?

Roots of the Tall Tale

DISCUSSION

1. How would early explorers have described Niagara Falls or the wonders of Yellowstone?
2. Did their listeners suspect their descriptions were Tall Tales?

Tall Tales are Regional

DISCUSSION

1. Have the students ever spoken to someone from another part of the country?
2. What differences in pronunciation did they notice?
3. Which terms and expressions did they find to be different from their own?

Create

Now create a Tall Tale character and story that fits Oklahoma. One that can describe our landscape, tells stories of the land run, and uses typical southern dialect. Make sure that you use lots of verbs and adjectives. Now when you come to your ending, make sure that you go out with a Bang . Put a surprise ending. As you write your Tall Tale be sure you use the following: an imagination, an open mind, creativity, and the ridiculous. All these things are necessary while writing your Tall Tale . So pens up and start writing.

Other Discussion Questions

1. What are some of the differences between a tall tale and a lie?
2. Do tall tales hurt people's feelings or trick them in a mean way?
3. Just because someone says something is true, does that make it true?
4. What is the difference between a fact and an opinion?
5. What makes a good Storyteller?

POST PERFORMANCE ACTIVITIES

TALL TALES STORY FRAME

After seeing Pecos Bill and the Ghost Stampede, fill in the story frame with information about the tall tale and Pecos Bill.

Title of Story

Author

WHO:	
WANTED TO:	
TRIED:	
COULDN'T BECAUSE:	
THEN:	
IN THE END:	

CREATE YOUR OWN!

Now create your own tall tale, fill in the story frame with information about your very own larger than life story and character. Then share with the class!

Title of Story

Author

WHO:	
WANTED TO:	
TRIED:	
COULDN'T BECAUSE:	
THEN:	
IN THE END:	

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES

Compare and Contrast Two Tall Tale Characters. Pick two tall tale characters and analyze how they were alike and different. First start by identifying the story elements of the tall tales. What exaggerations are made? Do you think either of your characters were American heroes? Why or why not? Do you think either character originated from a true story and then was exaggerated?

Illustrate A Tall Tale. Take one of the tall tales you find or one that you have written, and complete illustrations to go along with the story. Have fun, use your imagination, and don't forget to share, display your finished work.

Perform A Tall Tales Play. You can put together a performance of a famous tall tale you have read or write and perform an original tall tale production of your own. Curtains up! Videotape your play and share it with another class.

BEING A GOOD AUDIENCE MEMBER

Unlike television and movies, theatre is an art that thrives on the participation of the audience. Audience reactions and responses can be heard by the performers and have a direct effect on the quality of the entire performance. The following are guidelines to help theatergoers understand the importance and responsibilities of being a good audience member. Appropriate audience behavior ensures a good experience for everyone.

- It is best to arrive fifteen minutes early. If you are with a big group it is best to arrive thirty minutes early. Please visit rest rooms before or after the performance.
- Give your full attention to the performers. In return, the performers will give you back a better performance.
- Making comments and jokes during the show can distract those around you. If you or someone else isn't paying attention, you might miss the funniest joke in the show!
- Do not eat, drink, take photos, or record performances -- these things are disruptive and dangerous to the performers, and you will be escorted out of the theatre.
- Turn off or silence all electronics or anything that beeps. Even whispering to your neighbor is considered an inappropriate distraction.
- Positive audience sounds are encouraged. Applauding and/or laughing when the time is right is always a good way to participate in the show! And, by all means, please do participate if asked by the actors to contribute a verbal response.
- Think about your theatre experience during and after the performance. How does the material apply to your life? Are there lessons to be learned? Would you make the same decisions as the characters in the circumstances given? Did the performance inspire you? Are you happy, angry, bored or encouraged by what you saw? Think it through and talk about it with others after the show.

“Pa used to play me this awful goodnight song on his guitar. I never thought I’d miss that old twangin’ noise-maker.”

Missy

SUGGESTED READING

Saga of Pecos Bill, by Edward O'Reilly

Tall Tale America: A Legendary History of Our Humorous Heroes,
by Walter Blair

Sally Ann Thunder Ann Whirlwind Crockett, by Caron Lee Cohen

Cut From the Same Cloth: American Women of Myth, Legend & Tall Tale, by Robert San Souci

TELL US WHAT YOU THINK

We love to get letters from our audiences, telling us what they thought about the show. Send letters to: Oklahoma Children's Theatre
attn/ Elin Bhaird, 2501 N Blackwelder, Oklahoma City, OK 73106 or
email them to elin@oklahomachildrenstheatre.org

- How did the production elements—lights, costumes, set, sound—support or detract from the play? What would you have done differently? Why?
- Did you have a favorite scene or moment in the play? Which was it, and why?
- How did you feel when the play was over? How did you feel about the play a day later? A week later?
- In your opinion, what is *PECOS BILL* about? Would you recommend it to someone who hasn't seen it? Who would you recommend it to?

SPECIAL THANKS

Brent Logsdon



STAFF

Lyn Adams
Executive Director

Elin Bhaird
Artistic Director

Rodney Brazil
Education Director

Sondra McMillon
Outreach Coordinator

Christi Knight
Box Office Manager

SPONSORS

Ad Astra Foundation, BancFirst, Rose Rock Bank, Kirkpatrick Family Fund, Love's Travel Stops & Country Stores, National Endowment for the Arts, Oklahoma Arts Council, Allied Arts, Sarkeys Foundation, Sonic, America's Drive-In, Wanda L. Bass School of Music and Department of Theatre, AmeriCorps Oklahoma Service Program, BancFirst, Brewer Entertainment, Chesapeake Energy, Crowe & Dunlevy, Dillon Importing, The Jarrard Family / The Paper Palace, The Kerr Foundation, Mathis Brothers Furniture, Mercedes-Benz, Oklahoma's News Channel 4, Wilson Research Strategies.

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Oklahoma Children's Theatre

PRODUCTIONS

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July 19—30, 2006

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EDUCATION

Peace, Love & Summer Camps 2006

Now thru August 18, 2006

Call 606-7003 for More Information

-or log onto-

www.oklahomachildrenstheatre.org